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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

ESSAYS

BY

© GERALD HILL

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS.

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

FALL 1990

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SUBMITTED BY: Gerald Hill

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF: Master of Arts

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Date: Aug 3/90

ABSTRACT

Literary criticism, as meant and practiced in this thesis, is writing, creative writing. The "raw materials" used to fill the page are the memories, ideas, processes and writing selves used by the poet or fiction writer. The "primary" (literary) text is just one of those materials, important only insofar as the critic desires to write after reading that text. Thereafter, the critical text becomes its own authority and takes its own course. It is not the critic's job to go back to the supposed primary text in order to excavate its meaning or serve its effects. The traditional primary-secondary distinction no longer holds.

Genre boundaries are incidental when the "essay," the vehicle for critical writing, is extended towards fiction or autobiography. The essay becomes a fluid form, returning from the rigid, didactic application of traditional literary criticism to the informal, open, personal trying of Montaigne. The blurring of genre boundaries extends to this thesis, which features this Abstract, an Introduction, a Works Cited and, in the essays themselves, a claim to "critical" status (in the traditional sense) amid the freely "creative" writing.

The reading for this thesis was a raiding--a taking away from the text not to notate its supposed truth but to use selected elements of the text to generate "criticism." Such writing offers varying degrees of insight into the once-primary text, which is now just a trace, but also offers itself as a brand new primary text, a further elaboration of a kind of endless intertext from which all writing borrows.

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INTRODUCTION

There's too much Gerry Hill in it.

-E. L. Bishop, Professor

There's not enough Gerry Hill in it.

-Kristjana Gunnars, Writer

The writing to which my epigraphs refer is "Orlando, An Autobiography," included, in a later version, as a chapter of my thesis. Because the purpose of criticism is "take the reader back to the text," in the words of Professor Bishop, my criticism of Orlando, set as an autobiography "by" Orlando, is a fictitious self-writing that takes the reader only to Gerry Hill. Ms Gunnars, shown my text as a piece of "creative writing," remarked that "Orlando, An Autobiography" was "a good read, seems to work, is fun." (But, "Why spend your talents extracting a reading of other people's books?") Out of the irony created by the two responses to my "Orlando" and from the uncertainty about what writing can claim what name, my thesis project was formed. The project is, in part, an attempt to extend the essay form, especially the form of the critical essay, to include (if it likes) writing that honours its own authority as much as that of the master or "primary" text.

I have been aware of some uncertainty even in casually talking about this project. "I'm not exactly writing straight

criticism . . . ," I might say to someone. "I'm using the texts as starting points. . . ." To this response (if any): "Oh, you're writing ficto-criticism." Often I sketch a "creative" impulse and a "critical" impulse in the work I am doing and leave it to my interlocutor to merge the two. Details of my background obscure the issue too, for those who know such details. "What is your subject position?" someone asks. "I know you as a poet." Generally, I find the spaces among genres to be fascinating indeed. I cheerfully submit the same piece of writing to both a "Creative Non-fiction" contest and a fiction anthology. I marvel at Laurence Sterne's play on travel literature conventions in A Sentimental Journey, at the elusive boundaries of "design and truth" in autobiography, at the treatment of ethnography as writing, not just "science," in James Clifford's Writing Culture. "He's a blur," my slowpitch team-mates holler as I lumber around the basepaths. "Not so," I holler back, thinking of this section of my thesis. "I'm a blur-er."

Cheerfulness aside, I note how genre-consciousness may show its darker (greyer?) side. Even the daily newspaper reflects the hostility (a function, as usual, of misunderstanding) directed toward he or she who would transgress genre boundaries. In the Edmonton Journal, a reviewer's reference to Elly Danica's Don't: A Woman's Word as a "novel" occasions this indignant response:

> Lynne Van Luven should refer to a dictionary before she writes a book review. Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary defines the word "novel" as an invented prose narrative that is usually long and complex. An autobiography is the personal life history of the author and is based on truth. An autobiographical novel is a fictitious narrative based on some truths within the author's life. The word "fictitious" is

> defined as imaginary, false and assumed. Don't: A Woman's Word is a non-fictional, autobiographical account of Elly Danica's real-life experience. [. . .] [Van Luven's] word "novel" implie[s] fiction. (Letter, February 5, 1990, page A11)

In the same newspaper, Myrna Kostash speaks from the opposite point of view on genre matters, complaining that in a new anthology of "personal journalism" "there is little [. . .] which reflects the blurring of New Journalism with--excuse the expression--literature" (Review, "Journalism pieces too conventional," July 28, 1990, page A7). Kostash calls for a little transgression:

> I'm not arguing that journalism has literary value only when it approaches fiction: the document remains at the heart of it. But in these days of post-modern genre breakdown, I would expect to see magazine writers have a go at it too: violating rules of what an article is "supposed" to be.

I will outline later my view that this relationship between "document" and "literary value" is properly problematical for many writers of literary criticism today.

There is a particular attention to genre in publishers' presentations of the texts I selected for this project. The Prowler is labelled as "novel" on both its cover and title page (at the publisher's request, according to Kristjana Gunnars); Heroine is "a novel" on its cover only. Neither text "acts like a novel" thereafter, but the claim exists on the surface nonetheless. Swamp Angel, clearly packaged as a "New Canadian Library Classic," needs, therefore, no further genre identification. Orlando, in part a mock biography, is about

genre.[1] That, in fact, may help to explain why it has been relatively neglected among Woolf's works. Labelled "A Biography" on its title page, Orlando was almost waylaid at the start by the genre question.

> [T]he news of Orlando is black. We may sell a third that we sold of the Lighthouse before publication--not a shop will buy save in sixes and twelves. They say this is inevitable. No one wants biography. But it is a novel, says Miss Ritchie [the bookseller].
>
> But it is called biography on the title page, they say. It will have to go to the Biography shelf. I doubt therefore that we shall do more than cover expenses--a high price to pay for the fun of calling it a biography. (Diary 132-3)

Once the book was re-shelved to "Fiction," "The reception, as they say, surpassed expectation" (134).

* * *

I have indicated my attraction to the gaps among genres and to my intention with these essays to extend the genre of the critical essay. However, the reason I selected these four texts is that they selected me, in a sense: they gave me something to write--a desire, not just a topic. Louky Bersianik calls this the "task" of the critic: "to be on the look-out for a desire, a will-to-write" (41). Once conceived, then, this project became my writing for the period needed to complete it. As a writing

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[1]Woolf called for fiction as an aid to fact in giving the personality of the biographer's subject, and she praised the generic confusions created by biographies which undercut their own conventions. The "biographer" who ostensibly narrates Orlando, until even that facade is jettisoned, repeatedly protests (too much) that there are not enough facts . . . too much remains unsubstantiated. Orlando's fantastic life is beyond the biographer's (conventional) reach.

project, the only difference for me between this thesis and a sequence of poems or some other "creative" format is that four novels generate the writing, in this case, and that a degree of critical perspective, however loosely that will come to be defined, also influences the writing. I did not presume to identify any "unity" among the texts, although all four are written by women, three by Canadians, three by writer-critics--statistics which, I suppose, suggest obvious biases in my selection process. Three of the texts might be seen as genre curiosities too, and, as I have said, interest me for that reason alone. However, if they had not made me write, they would not be here.

To return to my narrative of the whole project: Given these genre "instincts" of mine, I looked for critical writing to which they were sympathetic, or with which they might be elaborated. Roland Barthes' The Pleasure of the Text provided an important articulation of how I wanted my Orlando paper to work:

> With the writer of bliss (and his reader) begins the untenable text, the impossible text. This text is outside pleasure, outside criticism, unless it is reached through another text of bliss: you cannot speak "on" such a text, you can only speak "in" it, in its fashion (22, his emphasis).

Hence, the "Autobiography": a literal speaking "in," a speaking from the inside. Of course, no matter how exciting I found Barthes' writing and ideas, especially when they applied so directly to my own project, Barthes himself was a marginal figure too easily ignored or dismissed. His ideas were too idiosyncratic, and they changed anyway! In his later writing Barthes turned, his critics say (here imagine a regretful shaking

of the head), positively literary. Still, I found Barthes' notion of throwing oneself across a text, rather than into it, a useful analogue for my process in creating my essays: the writing intersects the "primary" text, crosses, and extends in its own direction.

Turning from Barthes to the broader field of post-structuralist theory and criticism, I find innumerable practitioners of, at least commentators on, "criticism" as I mean it. But first, a brief passage through what Barthes calls "old criticism"--criticism as I do not mean it--as portrayed by those who set it up as a "straw man" to be more or less impolitely blown down. According to Edward Said, traditional criticism, "still ensnared by a simplistic opposition between originality and repetition" (154), respects the supposed stability of a "primary" text and attempts to reproduce it. Furthermore, says Said, critical writing, after Arnold, has been "covered [. . .] with the mantle of cultural authority and reactionary political quietism" (28). Geoffrey Hartman is another who names Arnold as the great upholder of separation between literature and criticism. Arnold, from "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time," provides the epigraph for Hartman's Criticism in the Wilderness:

> The epochs of Aeschylus and Shakespeare make us feel their pre-eminence. In an epoch like those is, no doubt, the true life of literature; there is the promised land, toward which criticism can only beckon. That promised land it will not be ours to enter, and we shall die in the wilderness: but to have saluted it from afar, is already, perhaps, the best distinction among contemporaries; it will certainly be the best title to esteem with posterity.

Imre Salusinszky, picking further on the Arnoldian Concordat, finds that Arnold turns criticism into

> a rather furtive and secondary activity . . . a kind of eavesdropping, knowing what other people already know and think. [. . .] Everybody would admit, says Arnold, 'that the critical faculty is lower than the inventive,' and that the 'critical power is of lower rank than the creative' (1).[2]

Jonathan Culler locates the villain closer at hand. "English and American critics," he says, "often assume that literary theory is the servant to a servant: its purpose is to assist the critic, whose task is to serve literature by elucidating its masterpieces" (7). The tone of Roland Barthes in Criticism and Truth is one of scorn for such servitude, in particular for how it is "[p]aralyzed by the prohibitions which accompanies its 'respect' for the work." Barthes adds:

> critical verisimilitude is almost reduced to silence: the thin slice of language which all this censure leaves it allows it only to claim the rights that institutions have over dead writers. It has deprived itself of the capacity to add a second discourse to the work, because it does not accept the accompanying risks. (55)

It is this "risk," this "second discourse," which contemporary critical writing must undertake.

The last word in this section goes to René Wellek and Austin Warren, whose first words, in their Theory of Literature, lay out

---

[2] Perhaps it takes Oscar Wilde, Arnold's contemporary, to refute Arnold adequately. Wilde's 1891 "The Critic as Artist," written as a dialogue, is almost a direct parody. He has Ernest declare (ironically) that "the creative faculty is higher than the critical" to which Gilbert replies, "The antithesis between them is entirely arbitrary" (355). Wilde, in fact, anticipates my entire thesis! In the course of his dialogue, he expresses--with his customary aphoristic vigour--these ideas: criticism is the invention of new forms, is to the work of art as the work is to its "raw materials," is one creation after another, is an art both creative and independent, is an intensification of the critic's personality, and more. (341-407).

one of the basic New Critical principles:

> We must first make a distinction between literature and literary study. The two are distinct activities: one is creative, an art; the other, if not precisely a science, is a species of knowledge or of learning. There have been attempts, of course, to obliterate this distinction [. . .]. (15)

My thesis, of course, is one of them.

* * *

If the loose array of attributes sketched in the preceding paragraphs comprises the "standard," what are some alternate conceptions of the relation between the primary (literary) text and the secondary (critical) text? Edward Said provides a series of questions of the critical essay's "modes of affiliation" with the primary text:

> How does it come to the text of its choice? How does it enter that text? What is the concluding definition of its relation to the text and the occasion it has dealt with? [. . .] Is the critical essay an attempt to identify or to identify with the text of its choice? Does it stand between the text and the reader, or to one side of one of them? [. . .] What is the essay's consciousness of its marginality to the text it discusses? [. . .] Finally, is the essay a text, an intervention between texts, an intensification of the notion of textuality, or a dispersion of language away from a contingent page to occasions, tendencies, currents, or movements in and for history? (50-1)

Said points out that such questions are not normally even asked by most critics, for whom, as we have seen, "criticism is considered essentially as defined once and for all by its secondariness, by its temporal misfortune in having come after the texts and occasions it is supposed to be treating" (51). He sounds a note echoing Barthes' "risks": "[R]ather than being

defined by the silent past, commanded by it to speak in the present, criticism, no less than any text, is the present in the course of its articulation, its struggles for definition." Said, in rejecting "the secondary role usually assigned to criticism" (51), is accompanied to the same conclusion by Michel Foucault:

> What is clear is that this gap [between 'literary' and other discourses] is neither stable, nor constant, nor absolute. There is no question of there being one category, fixed for all time, reserved for fundamental or creative discourse, and another for those which reiterate, expound and comment. (220-1)

Gayatri Spivak, in her Preface to Derrida's Of Grammatology, turns up the pressure on the primary/secondary split:

> The so-called secondary material is not a simple adjunct to the so-called primary text. The latter inserts itself within the interstices of the former, filling holes that are always already there. [. . .] The text is not unique (the acknowledged presence of polysemy already challenges that uniqueness); the critic creates a substitute. The text belongs to language, not to the sovereign and generating author. (lxxiv)

Language, ever present, is what dis-eases the smugness of the primary-secondary distinction. Such a supposed split is, of course, the "daddy of [. . .] all" the binary oppositions to be deconstructed (Salusinszky 12). "At any rate," Spivak adds, most provocatively,

> the relationship between the reinscribed text and the so-called original text is not that of patency and latency, but rather the relationship between two palimpsests. The 'original' text itself is that palimpsest on so-called 'pre'-texts that the critic might or might not be able to disclose and any original inscription would still only be a trace.[3] (lxxv)

---

[3] A Trace. Trace of the flu? of something contagious? Todorov: [T]he relationship between the author's and the critic's texts is one of contagion, not of analogy" (33)--that is, influence, not substitution.

The critic re-vises, just as the "original" artist had done.

* * *

Much of the energy for new (blurring of old) genres comes from women writers. A Mazing Space, an anthology filled with such energy, celebrates and names a space for the "collapsing [of] the formal gaps that conventionally distinguish fiction from essay" (x). "Much [feminist] theory, in the questions it raises about gender and genre, has enabled both lesbian and heterosexual women to modify and to invent genres which would articulate their sexuality," write Smaro Kamboureli and Shirley Neuman (xi). This is the body's call for new genres, to paraphrase Luce Irigaray (cited in Kamboureli, "Body" 36). Even Laurie Ricou, one of four men included in the anthology, opts for (what is apparently for him) a new way of writing--a journal instead of a "traditional academic essay with its seamless development of a single thesis" (206). Elsewhere in A Mazing Space, in the contributions of van Herk, Hlus, Harasym and others, is just the sort of "innovative combination of fiction and manifesto" which refuses "traditional genre semiotics" (Marks 37).

If I go on now to assume such a refusal--to assume that criticism has been rescued from its subordinate position vis-a-vis the "primary" text--what new kind of criticism am I talking about? What are its characteristics? In the first place, what reading practices must occur?

Edward Said suggests that "[r]eading and writing are

activities that theoretically and actually incorporate within them most of one's needs for the production and the understanding of a text" (129). No wonder critics who are not "old" (in Barthes' sense) adopt "procedural guidelines" like these: "[t]o take apart, to produce a reading, to open the textuality of a text" (Spivak xlix). These critics must read as creatively as they write; they are, in fact, readers who "produce" rather than "protect," in Spivak's words (lxxv), or "readers who write," in Barthes' (Criticism 91). That "creaturely state always preceding the writing act" (Kamboureli, Writer vii) is itself alive, as hungry and desirous as writing is. When we read, we act on the text before us. Geoffrey Hartman gives this notion a more sober garb:

> The reading a critic gives when writing about literature simply establishes an equation that balances the authority of a given text against a produced text (commentary). Each work of reading does this anew. We have talked for a long time, and unselfconsciously, of the work of art; we may come to talk as naturally of the work of reading. (162)

But when that work is done, or even while that work is done, the writing begins. (Which is why I say The Prowler, for example, is so good I couldn't finish it, so good I couldn't stop writing to pick it up.)

The vocabulary in the writing of these creative readers offers a variety of verbs to note the action of departure from the primary text: "outplay" (Barthes, Grain 145); "become more 'poetic' than . . ." (Poulet 111); "liberate the text into its own potential" (Kroetsch 64); "enhanc[e] a great feminine intertext" (Lori Saint-Martin qtd. in Bersianik 39); "unravel" and "gesture" (Williamson 167); "mak[e] it new" (Godard, "Other"

14); "carrying-forward [. . .] the movement of ideas" (Godard et al. 13); "free criticism" and "create a second language" (Barthes, Criticism 55, 80); and carry "off beyond any book and toward the new writing" (Cixous 884). For anyone using such vocabulary, the primary text is no longer the object. It has been replaced by a blank page. The job is now to write; the (once-) primary text has taken its place as just another 'raw material' in the writer's field.

This is no doubt a threatening proposition for a critic whose self-worth (career, reputation) depends not on departing, in the manner suggested above, but on returning--a critic who "shuts, locks and bolts the work," (Bersianik 41). Consider an image composed from another catalogue of terms, this time a series of nouns and adjectives associated with various writers' critical projects: fabulist (Spivak), fantasy (Williamson), bliss (Barthes), reverie (Bachelard), performance (Kroetsch), delirium (Barthes), ludic (Hartman, Brossard), novelty (Foucault), mystic (Wilde), and anarchy (Lukács). Hedonistic, galactic, festive--there are many more, of course. The image here escapes conventional critics. Volatile and carnivalistic, it is not properly decorous; it is rejected out of hand.

* * *

Critics of contemporary criticism may defuse its explosiveness, so to speak, by considering the history of the genre, the essay, within which they write. Here is Michèle

Richman's sketch of that history:

> With Montaigne as common ancestor, the English essay exhibited for many generations the same characteristics as its French counterpart. Enjoying maximal fluidity, it was informal and familiar, with an 'amoeba-like' versatility often held together by little more than the author's voice. Primarily an urban genre, it allowed the author to use himself as starting point for digressions on the mundanity of everyday life. [. . .]
>
> Post-Montaigne, the essay split into two distinct modalities: one remained informal, personal, intimate, relaxed, conversational, and often humorous; the other, dogmatic, impersonal, systematic, and expository. (ix-x)

The Barthesian essay--both inheritor of the former modality and a fragment of things to come--is characterized as "an open-ended, interminable writing machine" which "constantly tries out new ways, with the result that it is always on trial" (xix) or, again, taking "risks." Here, of course, we are at the word _essay_ itself. Its etymology: _exagium_ -> exact weighing, ordeal, examination -> _essayer_ "to try"; _faire l'essai_ "try out"; _mettre à l'essai_ "put to the test" (Bensmaia 96). And here is Montaigne, in the words of his editor, Walter Kaiser: "One can only try. One can only experiment. One can only make essays" (xv). Montaigne himself did not choose his genre lightly: "Were my mind settled, I would not essay, but resolve myself; it is still a prentice and a probationer" (xiv). Articulating further that original probationary spirit of his own essaying, Montaigne writes, "Judgement is an instrument for all subjects, and meddleth everywhere. And therefore in the essays I make of it, there is no manner of occasion I seek not to employ therein" (16). If he or she wishes, then, let the nervous critic attribute the experimentation in the contemporary critical essay to a nostalgia for the open-ness of Montaigne, for the essential _trying_ of _to_

essay.

"What is an essay?" Georg Lukács asks in his 1910 introduction, written as a letter, to Soul and Form. "I speak here of criticism as a form of art" (2), he says, dismissing from the beginning a conception of criticism as a science: "Science affects us by its contents, art by its forms; science offers us facts and the relationships between facts, but art offers us souls and destinies" (3). (He uses the same terms, then, as Wellek and Warren but to opposite effect.) Lukács' distinction between an "image-creating" function of criticism, rather than a "significance-supposing" function (5)--between "living" and "life" (4, his emphases)--gives criticism some room, some departure room. From that freer space, essays may address their questions "directly to life itself: they do not need the mediation of literature or art" (3).

* * *

Gail Scott provides a contemporary version of some of Lukács' ideas.

"Essays by Gail Scott," reads the cover of her Spaces Like Stairs. There is authored writing inside, writing "created by" Gail Scott. In her Preface, Scott immediately evokes the spirit of (neo-) Montaigne: "An essay is a perpetual work-in-progress." And she names the excitement and risks of essaying:

> I like the immediacy of this: the way an essay (even more than fiction) precisely intersects the period in which it is written. The way it is marked, at a given moment, by its context, its community, both of which are also part of how

the writer is and how she changes over time. (9)

Notable here is not only her "worldliness" (in Said's sense) but also her parenthetical "even more than fiction" tag. Scott threatens (I use the word ironically) to out-ficto ficto-criticism! Indeed, "the essay is the form," she writes (109), and, to Scott, it resides somewhere past genre where the poetic and the personal; the self-reflexive and the fictional; the "network of women speaking, writing, thinking (10)"; the theoretical and the imaginary; the postmodern writing strategies --where they all reside. "Essay/texts," Scott calls the meeting point (with that typical slash where the gap used to be).

I call that point simply "writing" and quote Roland Barthes:

> Formerly separated by the worn-out myth of the 'superb creator and the humble servant, both necessary, each in his place, etc.', the writer and the critic come together, working on the same difficult tasks and faced with the same object: language. (Criticism 64, his emphasis).

The same object, language, is correctly named as the "authority," if there must be one, by Gayatri Spivak in a statement already cited: "The text is not unique. [. . .] The text belongs to language, not to the sovereign and generating author" (lxxiv). Frank Davey calls for the appropriate readjustment: "[T]he critic's attention [must turn] back to where the writer's must always be--on literature as language, and on writing as writing" (12). To locate such critics and writing that violates what Barthes calls "a taboo upon a certain kind of discourse about a book: [. . .] that language should talk about language" (Criticism 33), I follow Davey's narrowing of geographic focus and pick up his "writer-critic" label: "With few critics

interested in writing as writing, it is not surprising that Canada has in recent years [the last ten or so] seen the emergence of a large number of writer-critics" (2). I have mentioned A Mazing Space and, indirectly, the NeWest Press "The Writer as Critic" series which consists, so far, of texts by George Bowering and Stephen Scobie. Gail Scott, as we have seen, describes and enacts the writer-critic blend. She notes:

> My writing about writing frequently happens in the spaces between my fictional output, the theoretical observations coming after the risk of writing is taken. Yet, they spur on the next act of fiction. In fact, the fictional "risk" depends, to some extent, on the capacity of the theoretical imagination to leap forward even as it sums up what went before. But the process is not chronological: the fiction often interrupts the theoretical imagination as if, when writing about writing, I too cannot forget the body through which the words proceed. (Spaces 66)

"Act of fiction," "theoretical imagination"--those phrases in themselves, as used by Scott, elude precise classification, and when they co-exist in a single piece of writing the result can be exhilarating. I shall mention again how her essay "Paragraphs Blowing on a Line" works both as a commentary on Heroine and a merging with the novel. The last essay in Spaces Like Stairs is, simply, a merging--a line-broken, syntax-disturbed, loose and self-reflexive, thoughtful essay(ing). Writing out of a similar political/textual milieu, Nicole Brossard, in The Aerial Letter, offers twelve "textual landscapes" in which text and sexuality and Brossard's touring "I" unfold from one another in writing (the only word that will do for Brossard's text).

* * *

Extracts from the essays of Robert Kroetsch could usefully insert themselves throughout much of this Introduction. A brief tour of Kroetsch may serve as both a conclusion to this section and as a gesture of my appreciation of this writerly writer-critic for whom the word "story," present in so many Kroetsch essays, tells the story of all his writing. "Beyond Nationalism: A Prologue," for instance, begins:

> Hearing the silence of the world, the failure of the world to announce meaning, we tell stories. [. . .] We tell stories and then, hearing our stories told, we ask if their meaning is in the content, or in the telling itself. As critics we elaborate the doubt that our stories were intended to contain. (64)

Note the creative-to-critical continuum in his "story." As he mentions in an interview, "I think criticism is really a version of story. [. . .] That's why criticism is so exciting. Not because it provides answers, but because it is a version of story" (qtd. in Godard, "Other" 5). The depth of this story impulse is more explicit in Kroetsch's statement from "The Grammar of Silence":

> There is, possibly, a story that repeats itself, with significant variations of course, whether we are describing and exploring the ethnic experience as sociologists, as psychologists, as novelists and poets, or as literary critics. (84)

Criticism as elaboration--and elsewhere, for Kroetsch, as extension and liberation of the text (64), as breaking out (108), as swerving (145), narration (196), and, again, as writing (163). By writing his reading, by telling his story, Kroetsch journeys through his essays, without the mustering of other critics' views prior to departing on his own. On beginnings, in fact, Kroetsch's writing demonstrates the altogether refreshing

belief that when one beginning exhausts itself, the writer leaves a space and begins anew. Similarly, his writing consumes (what I presume to be) his unsystematic readings of one theorist or another. Foucault, Barthes, Bakhtin, Iser, Heidegger, Lyotard and others are told as figures in the Kroetsch story, jostling with favourite texts such as Surfacing, As For Me and My House, The Mountain and the Valley, The Double Hook, and The Diviners. Kroetsch's response to these writers, including the theorists, is a writer's response. His is writing both insightful (in the 'old' critical sense of some essence being "in" a text to be "sighted" by the critic) and autonomous. It both finds and, to use his own term, un-hides, both speaks to a text and from a text--above all, is a text, a gloriously open piece of writing that claims to both be and be about. I celebrate such qualities in Kroetsch's critical writing, then, as a nod in the direction I intend for my own writing.

* * *

I call the following essays "creative" partly to ease the genre expectations of my readers but mainly to acknowledge that this writing is my "creative writing" for now, my way of answering "Fine, yes" to poet friends who ask "How's the writing going?" At the same time, I claim "critical" status for the essays, even critical in the traditional sense of the word, in that I hope the reader will wake refreshed, to borrow a phrase from Virginia Woolf, from my writing. Finally, then, I offer a

brief introduction to the essays that follow.

By naming the essay on The Prowler "The Prowler: An Essay" I am, I suppose, already re-working Kristjana Gunnars' text, even just to re-label it. My essay shares the same title with Gunnars' novel, begins with her novel, uses pieces of Gunnars' writing as literal starting points, as titles or labels for short sections of its own writing. It makes Gunnars' text both mine and a mine, a go-mine: go write. So "The Prowler: An Essay" makes graphically literal the kind of criticism I want to read. It begins with a line or two of the "source" text, lines selected simply because they call for writing. It offers a commentary (a noticing) of the text. Then it goes on to further writing about a "he," the essay-writer, and his commentary about the whole process. (More urgently and explicitly than in the others, this essay's writing speaks for, and about, itself.) Some of the sections venture further yet, out where fiction might be. When that's all done, "he" reads more of The Prowler until the next call to write. When the end comes: stop writing. Print.

In writing from Swamp Angel I want to pay my respects to Ethel Wilson. Out of appreciation for a certain image of Ethel Wilson, the person--gentle, quiet, modest, generous, and so on, the same qualities present in her writing--I am more careful, more deferent to Wilson's text than to the other texts. And in so doing I am able, am forced, to add a different shading to the over-all "style" of my project. "A flow: Ethel Wilson's Swamp Angel" seems milder (quieter, more modest etc.) than my writing on a text like The Prowler. Still, I want to "be creative" while

commenting on Wilson's text and trying (gently) to make some connections to the other writers.

"Across Reference: A Heroine Dictionary" itself includes why I wanted to write it ("I first read Heroine just after the killing of fourteen . . ." and after "a pathologically-obsessed man had tracked [a friend] down in Edmonton"); how I could find a position from which to write about such a text (I am one of those reader/writers who pause in the unwinding spiral of women's writing in Canada (Neuman xi)); and what form I could use ("It was difficult to write body without writing language soon thereafter, and image soon after that, then body again . . ."). And writing about Heroine, it soon became obvious, was a way to get involved, even in a necessarily tentative way, in the study and excitement of écriture feminine, fiction-theory, feminist theory.

Virginia Woolf was the first writer I encountered in my graduate studies. The weekly reading of another Woolf text was, I remember, almost a weekly peak experience. I was simply amazed at the beauty and force of her writing. And frustrated that every new week meant an abrupt halt to my reverie (often to begin, luckily, a new one). This became a generalized frustration at the critical enterprise which called for analysis, for writing that "should take us back to the text"--a process which felt (that is the level on which I perceived it) completely wrong. If a text can make me write, I want to see what the writing will be. I want to resist, as I think I have already made clear, a re-painting of the "source" text already behind me. My paper on

Orlando, then, was what brought these considerations to a head. Determined equally not to attempt a critical mastery of Woolf's text and, instead, to use the enormous desire to write with that text, I created an autobiography from Orlando's point of view. It was a way of naming a reading of Orlando and, better yet, of enacting that reading from the inside. Orlando remains a part of my project. A wonderful, brilliant text in its own right, I love it too for what it does (makes me write) and for its handy presence in the blur among genres.

"You kill what bothers you," Roland Barthes said. (90)

She doesn't tell us where he says that;[1] no page citation is required in a novel, by convention.

This writing gives clues to what it is, then withdraws them. This writing begins where it might be one thing or the other.

The Prowler has no page numbers, he notes (the writer of this essay notes), so that to quote from it he will use the numbers that begin each section. No page numbers, as if there is to be no source even for the writing after The Prowler, as if The Prowler is meant to fade into/out of presence, both with and without distinction, a story before and after itself, a live text existing in its own sweet time.

( )

Around these dolls I built an entire world. (22)

Unlike the world around the "two brown-haired rubber dolls," the world around Gunnars' fragments, some no bigger than a line, is nothing but the space towards which the fragments gesture. They want to establish an emptiness to which originality may be attributed: "Somewhere in all this, the story

---

[1]He doesn't say it in his manifesto "The Death of the Author" in Image - Music - Text, although the writer of The Prowler, insofar as she is "bothered" by her own status as authority, kills or at least wants to un-authorize herself.

begins" (11).

No wonder he is all in pieces over The Prowler. It seems to want to be pieces of itself; its self (lest wholeness be implied) seems to want to be at piece.

A piece of Roland Barthes:

> [I]f you put the fragments one after the next, is no organization possible: Yes: the fragment is like the musical idea of a song cycle . . . each piece is self-sufficient, and yet it is never anything but the interstice of the neighbors: the work consists of no more than an inset, an hors-texte. (Roland Barthes 94).

If I were her, he thinks, I'd look to the fragment too. That is, no matter how delicate the arrival of story, how lyrical its presence, how understated its narration, I'd keep the space close at hand, just a line or two ahead. I'd be sure my cursor marks right now the final word. I'd be sure that claims to I or my would risk a fade to black at any time.

His response upon hearing Gunnars read from The Prowler in 1989 was a desire to have written something like that, to write something like that, to write this as fragments, be narration but not narrator, make this too a story that floats free of its writing.

( )

It is a relief to be under no obligation. . . . It is there and I know it will hatch. (28)

How much obligation does he feel: not to be clever, not to be smartass, not to attempt to over-prowl The Prowler but to stay

fragmented, to "finish," to write.

And how much confidence? His paper on The Diviners and Beloved is rejected by a Canadian academic journal. The paper is an attempt simply to write as a poet (by which he means . . .) in response to one element common to those two great novels. Naturally his paper is rejected on the grounds that the language is too loose and that there is no attempt whatsoever to play out the history of critical comment on either text in order to make a claim for advancing such a history. Here he happily quotes in full the dissenting opinion of the one Advisory Board member who recommends publication: "I find the paper to be beautifully written and argued. Its strengths lie in the force and imaginative quality of the images it employs and the vitality and variation in its diction."

It is there and I know it will hatch. It is there and he knows it will hatch; he reads and understands (he thinks) and has confidence not only in his own authority but in his own way of writing out of the bounds of sour grapes, criticism, The Prowler and this very essay.

( )

In the margins there's another story. . . . that is where the real book is. (47)

He struggles with what is called voice. He assumes that as long as he keeps writing, the appropriate voice will sound itself although there seems to be a call for more than one

voice. The voice of reading. The voice of writing. The Master's voice, the ego. And the very real call to Get This Done. Like Gunnars, he desires some center point equidistant from all hails (although hers, of course, are different ones). With regard to Gunnars, however, he knows he must de- that -center; The Prowler is quite clear about its denial of center as source. The Prowler, in fact, turns centers inside out so that the fragments of story and writing are the heart while notions of official story, telling, I and, in general, control are pushed out into orbit, space junk. The margins become central, the offical story repelled.

( )

Because I am full of love, I am full of sorrow. (34)

Elegy in Gunnars' text: so much desire for that which is so distant, so much distance from remembered desiring. Her writing is not afraid to love, to call for love. The lover is named--"I"--but, like other agents in the text, is also set just free enough to avoid precise identification with its own authority.

He remembers to insert this note on The Prowler's nod to Margaret Laurence, Toni Morrison and Virginia Woolf, to name just three, for whom all things happen at once. The writer zooms back to memory, in memory, and writes what is now true of then. The Icelandic schoolgirl who remarks on the eyes of the seals might someday say this will never have been, or this isn't true yet, or

this episode is true-to-be.

Love is what remembers; love makes memory work.

( )

Later I read the history . . . (45).

The Prowler as reading notes. She browses through her country's history;[2] she reads it, and writes.

As a colonial history, then, The Prowler contains the kind of bitterness, anxiety, and political and economic subjugation Canadians know all too well. The implications of a nation's colonial status for its imagination are available in The Prowler. A few of the sections convey much of the life of the powerless whose language, customs, futures, physical well-being, even bodies become playthings to the colonizers Denmark, southern Europe, America.

He wonders what of his own history to read and write. The British who emigrated to Ontario last century. The British-Canadians who settled in Saskatchewan early this century. The father who wrote love letters from Belgium during WW II. The mother who arrived, seven months pregnant, in Herbert in 1951. ("We had no money, no furniture. It was hot. It was awful.")

The thesis project before this one was to read certain old

---

[2]But my is disclaimed in favour of my father's as possessor of "country." A stance of occupying her own country is avoided; there is no self to act as possessor.

letters, then to remember and write--read, write, and remember jostling with one another in a series of fragmented forms which, by resisting story, set the story moving.

( )

Gripped by an irresistible urge to eat one tomato, I surreptitiously swallowed the bites soundlessly. There were many, so I ate another. And another. (48)

The Prowler, so restrained, so suppressed, offers its emotion in juicy, coloured bites of fruit, like "vegetables to an undernourished nation" (26), like love (the blood of cold-blooded prose). A tomato, elsewhere a lemon and a strawberry, are The Prowler's wholes. (Barthes: "the novelist, by citing, naming, noticing food . . . imposes on the reader the final state of matter, what cannot be transcended, withdrawn" (Pleasure 45)). "[T]he juice, the meat, the rind, everything but the seeds" (8) form a sudden pleasure amid the spare distance and hopelessness of the past. Now they "grow every summer."

( )

I imagine a story that allows all speakers to speak at once. (68)

He imagines an essay that speaks to a text, that speaks under a pretext, that speaks from a text, that hears the text and answers or does not quite, that used to be here, that is on the off-track, that essays (as action), that acts as essay, that

tries itself in knots.

( )

Words are not what they signify. We confuse the signifier with the signified. Words are only words. They live in an atmosphere of their own. (52)

So The Prowler speaks about its own status as a house of words. "Atmosphere" here may be another name for Gunnars' writing, for its lightness, its material for inspiration, its occasional settling, its polemical dirt (when the bitterness of the colonized sets in and The Prowler becomes a coming of rage story).

He quotes the next paragraph in full:

> Words are suitcases crammed with culture. I imagine a story of emptied containers. Bottles drained of their contents. Travel bags overturned, old clothes, medicine bottles, walking shoes falling all over the airport floor. To come to your destination with nothing in hand. To come to no destination at all. (52)

Her "I" slips free of the suitcase metaphor by imagining, with a handy slightness, altered versions of it. But she maintains "destination" and comes to it for the end of the suitcase metaphor: "with nothing in hand." Then destination again, this time with the story "of emptied containers": no destination at all." The words are loaded, the story empty. The writer hungers full of words for the emptiness.

( )

We are no longer entertained by pretense. There is too much knowledge. Too much self-consciousness. There are always other stories, metastories . . . (55)

He looks up with a start, silently debates the self-consciousness question, finds something else: Why must a story "that does not desire pretense . . . incorporate its own metastories"? Gunnars' attempt to play the whole field--the story, the denial of story, the talk (her "metastory") about story and denial of story, the reading-to-be--pushes The Prowler farther apart (extends it, he means). Both darkens and lightens the texture of the writing--darkens for those readers who just love The Prowler except for its "game-playing" or its "intrusive narration," and lightens, he suspects, for the writer herself, since story can now be said to beam in (an incredible lightness of beaming) on narration rather than the other way around.

( )

[W]e took off our clothes and swam naked in the stilled dark seawater. (79)

Coming at the end of a section, a fragment or two, on socioeconomic class, the we here is two girls who were "made to understand" that they are "segregated" from one another.

For now, We is The Prowler and any other text from which stilled darkness extends out of sight. The Prowler secretly skinny-dips in such a darkness, running to shore at times or

skimming its fingers over the waves, phosphorescent: tiny sparks in sight, immense blackness out of it.

( )

We understood that a prowler was loose in the area. (56)

The scenario of space and violation--a girl's space prowled--applies itself to the whole text. The vaguely threatening male form (the prowler is as variously and sketchily defined as so many other figures in the text) cuts into, or threatens to, the lyrical/gentle/elegaic/innocent tonalities of the text, thereby slashing them (graphically speaking).

It is something else he'd like to consider in a piece of writing of his own: keep all contraries at hand, name one side as a way of not-naming (but implying) the other, set up "two white Inuit girls, one of them apprehensive," set the stage (one of Gunnars' metaphors) and cross it, both prowl and be prowled.

"Tensions," is the common word for this, or "suspension": she keeps him (he remembers an old Malapropism) in suspenders.

( )

"You are contained in the things you love," she said, H.D. said. (54)

The Prowler throws up appealing aphorisms one writes down intending to write under them only to realize that the desire to write under The Prowler is found, in this instance, not in the

words of The Prowler but in space, the white silence from which all writing takes its shape. The Prowler becomes invisible, its effects felt.

So he is directed elsewhere by the writing. "Hit it where they ain't," as the veteran slugger advises the rookie. He looks away, shaded by The Prowler's suppressions. The words subtract attention from themselves.[3] He finds himself where they ain't.

( )

The school I went to . . . (65).

During a preliminary attempt to get ready for writing The Prowler, Kristjana Gunnars went to the library in Winnipeg and read every Icelandic newspaper from the 1950s. The two issues dominating national consciousness at the time were the twelve-mile offshore fishing limit and the translation of the Sagas. Neither of those issues found its way into The Prowler.

This is something The Prowler learns from The Lover: the past is image more than fact. (Everybody knows this but let's pretend The Prowler is just now amazed and delighted to find out.) "Everyone knows it wasn't like that," as Timothy Findley and every postmodernist knows (3).

The school he went to was an old red brick building. He wore a Davey Crockett shirt and big eyes. He looked up to Mrs. Campbell and told stories. This much he knows.

---

[3]Barthes: "I write because I do not want the words I find: by subtraction" (Pleasure 40).

( )

I fell into no category. (65)

Novel, or so says the title page. But the usual expectations (especially distinctions between author, reader and protagonist--all of them are prowlers in The Prowler) must be su pended, suspension (as in hanging loose) being, in fact, a useful state in which to experience the delicate currents of this novel.

Long poem. The Prowler enacts the principles of longpoem poetics as outlined by Gunnars in Trace: intertextuality (the already-written as ghost writer), undererasure (the writing--its authority, its "I," its story, its emotion--"nullifies itself by undercutting statement and suggestion all along the line"), evasiveness (as above: continual disengagement), and continual present (the past re-membered, the past and the present equidistant from the writing now) (179-186).

Diary. The text talks to itself, making admissions, submissions, claims, counter-claims--"prowling in the reader's domain." Being so explicitly textual, The Prowler is full of itself, of its own play and its own peculiar status.

(Fictional) autobiography. A life-story, with problematization of self, offers an achronological structure.

He notes that The Prowler is to her project as this writing is to his: gestures towards . . . (in)completion of . . . acknowledgment of authority in . . . approaches to . . .

( )

There are theorists who say. . . . [t]here is no such thing as truth. (68)

There are theorists. An honest text, as The Prowler aspires to be, is transparent about the theorists who have influenced it: "What theorists, Ms Gunnars, have had an influence on the kind of writing you do in The Prowler?" "What theorists? Read the text [you idiot]. They're all named."

There are theorists. The Prowler, one of Roland Barthes' "writerly" texts, is a fantasyland for fan(tasie)s of postmodern theory. Readers who do not enjoy theory might say, "I loved The Prowler, but I skipped all the game parts."

He can begin as Gunnars does, bound in nots: not writing, not poetry, not prose, not character and setting, not plot, not even story. Only then, after not enough, will the story take its place out of the ever-present negative of space.

She loves me not. He loves her not.

( )

The dust cannot be seen, felt, heard or smelled, but it lodges in you and makes you susceptible to diseases much later in life. (72)

This is, he supposes, illness as metaphor again. A kind of genetic intertext by which the body of The Prowler is

contaminated. The fragments as cells ("Every piece is its own center"). The Prowler lives out its intertextuality and will die from it. Fade in, fade out.

But The Prowler is a good citizen of the textual world, openly grateful to its forerunners while affirmative about its own status as individual text. It "tells all other texts: there is only one of me" (69).

Waves-like, both One and one of Many. Is this where he talks about The Waves?

He will write out the ending, knowing the end, as a tribute to his father, although it will not come out as such. It will end on one of the lyrical notes. Later, left for the end.

( )

I imagine a text . . . (81)

I imagine a text, she says textually. She speaks of that which she imagines at the same time as speaking in the way she imagines. The Prowler is a text so profoundly careless of chronology that it has already done what it says it would like to do. The Prowler begins all things at once: a beginning, a no-beginning; a self, a negation of self; a telling, a denial of status as teller. The Prowler begins the world, an instant always.

His baby daughter wakes from her sleep and instantly begins a plane of functioning that has always--always-already, he adds--gone on. Her awakening is not a one-by-one re-engagement

with stimuli. It is engagement, period. A switch back on, time asleep being just the interlude between fragments awake (although he entertains the converse of that notion). The baby takes her place as a center of agency, reception, involuntary action and purposeful hailing as soon as she begins a new fragment (so to speak).

( )

Materials for stories came from magical places so far away. (83)

That's what I thought, Kristjana Gunnars admitted in conversation, until I wrote The Prowler. "I thought, before I wrote it, I had the most ordinary childhood. But the ordinary is special."[4]

All right, then (he thinks), the many estrangements--from self, chronology, language, parents, homeland and so on--are special because they are ordinary. There are no magical places so far away. His daughter takes a book to a special place behind a spruce tree at the back of the yard. She reads "stories" while living one--the story, he supposes, of hiding and silence and (he further imagines, less elegantly) of traffic noise, prickles and turds.

And his own childhood, ordinary except for its telling. Ordinary, but figured on a memory-sensitive screen. Ordinary, but desirable.

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[4]It is a question he asked her after reading The Lover: Is yours a special past?

( )

At that time I wrote my first story. (88)

Oregon, 1964. Poor user of English, immigrant, the "cardhouse" of imagination "tumbled overnight." A call for a new voice: I write. Extra-ordinary, she defers the Pledge of Allegiance because, she tells the others, she needs "more time to think about it" (87).

New to America, the girl needs to think about the Flag, the Republic for which it stands, the one Nation under God, the liberty and justice for all. The Prowler, in citing the name of the Pledge, sets itself in ironic opposition to this "indivisibility," this "one Nation," this "all." The Prowler does not stand upright, hand over heart, pledging allegiance. The Prowler does not fall silent before a colour guard, does not get its gun, does not fight.

( )

If there are magic words they must all be far away. (92)

There are no magic words, no, and the lack is always on-line, always on, next. Above erasure, this lack cannot be lost accidentally (even lackadaisically). It requires no memory. The Prowler is no memory, no-memory. It is no to a t, it knows not. It is easy with its story but just as easily not.

He would, after The Prowler, hold not only the words before

him to be entered (selected) or not, but also the impossibility of making work for words. In the economy of memory, his story simply would not work; it could not have been. All of which he would remember.

( )

After the text appears the writer is exiled from it. (96)

The line between the writer and her text finds occasional elaboration as an impossibly wide space which she painstakingly approaches and finally crosses only to find herself beyond the destination already. Before is just the flip-side of after, a flip of the tongue, a trick vocal that says "I said."

"The text," in The Prowler, has at least as many desires, characteristics, functions, deceptions and displays as "the writer" and "the reader." The Prowler is a rise out of them, their huge joint effort.

"Full-frontal textuality," he calls it.

A Flow: Ethel Wilson's Swamp Angel

I am interested in what Ethel Wilson and Virginia Woolf wrote about the "source" of Swamp Angel and The Waves, respectively. Each identified a single image to which she attributes the impulse or origin of her novel. In each case the image marks both beginning and ending; it serves as a centered and centering consciousness, a unifier of style and theme within each text.[1] Before approaching the image in Swamp Angel, I will briefly note how this kind of framing process works for Virginia Woolf, whom Wilson had read extensively prior to her own relatively brief publishing career.[2]

In a diary entry dated September 30, 1926, Woolf writes, "One sees a fin passing far [. . .]. I hazard a guess that it may be the impulse behind another book" (104). The writing of this book, The Waves, only began seriously in 1929. Finally, on February 7, 1931, she writes, "I must record, Heaven be praised, the end of the The Waves [. . .]. I mean that I have netted that

---

[1]Lacking enough Derrida to confidently apply sous rature to "centered," "centering," "unifier," "source," and "origin" in order to acknowledge my uneasiness with such terms, I opt, instead, for the simple sous of this note near the bottom of the page.

[2]There are other parallels, minor but noteworthy, between the two women. Although both were born in the 1880s, Wilson did not publish her first novel until 1947, thirty-two years after Woolf's first. Wilson was apparently somewhat ambivalent about Woolf's writing, complaining of its "patrician" quality (Wilson herself was described as "patrician" by George Woodcock (45)) while offering this praise: "It is authentic--time, place, inner life all blended" (Stouck 188), qualities Wilson achieved in her own prose.

fin in the waste of water which appeared [in 1926]" (165-66).

Her great novel may be understood in terms of the image she uses to frame its creation; its important themes and motifs and its poetic power are implicit in the relationship between fin and water. Every figure in The Waves either emerges out of, or sinks back into, a great fluid ground: one person from a crowded street, identity from dissolution, facts from darkness beyond, scenes from "interludes," one character from six, sound from silence, a crest from a trough, Bernard summing up from a pre-linguistic formlessness, the true story from all possible stories, and so on. The Waves, to take the exquisite short-cut of a single image, is the story of a fin in a waste of water.

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In an unpublished talk called "Somewhere Near the Truth," Ethel Wilson expresses Swamp Angel's causal image this way:

> As to Swamp Angel, I don't know how it originated, except that I love fly-fishing which is a marvellous thing in life, unique in the deep communion of the senses and rich in contemplation and memory; it is all that. (qtd. in Stouck 87)

Wilson, pleasingly careless here about truth and origin, ("somewhere near . . ."; "I don't know . . ."), could be speaking as her character Maggie Lloyd--the later, self-actualized Maggie. But early in the novel we learn that Maggie (still merely Mrs. Vardoe) has been secretly selling trout-fishing flies in order to finance her escape from the (mainly self-imposed) underachievement of her life to that moment. This scene, an analepsis, cuts into the moments just before her flight from the urban sleaze of a husband, Eddie

Vardoe, to "enter the continent," begin her journey, find her way to the water with which she will share such deep communion.

By tying flies, Maggie unties herself, eventually, and loosens herself into the fluid body of contemplation, memory, and engagement with the world.

- - - - - -

Water, then:

> the source of all potentialities in existence; the source and grave of all things in the universe; the undifferentiated; . . . the first form of matter, 'the liquid of the whole verification' (Plato). . . . symbolic of the Mother and associated with birth, the feminine principle, the universal womb . . . the liquid counterpart of light . . . also equated with the continual flux of the manifest world, with unconsciousness, forgetfulness; [waters] always dissolve, abolish, purify, 'wash away' and regenerate . . . (Cooper 188-89)

and so much more. I must tread this "water" warily; may its symbology, now cited, be erased?[3]

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Still, water. So much acts like water in Swamp Angel, as if water, from somewhere else, spills its features in and over the limits of this novel, or as if water is the sur-face, the underworld which inscribes itself in the writer, the written and

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[3]Ethel Wilson shares my wariness (although, I suppose, for different reasons): "I became positively anti-symbol," she writes in a letter (qtd. in Stouck 325), and in an essay: "I am not symbol-minded" (Stouck 85). In Swamp Angel she has Nell decide "The Angel must go . . . because it is a symbol and too dear . . ." (79, ellipses Wilson's) with the consequence, Nell later adds, that "it can blot out the truth it represents" (119).

beyond . . .[4]

By considering water, I may align myself with much of Swamp Angel, and, conversely, to talk about that novel is to use much of the vocabulary of water, although a single word is enough: the word "flow." My paper simply collects all that "flows," all the flow-ers, in Swamp Angel.

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Maggie's body does not flow, precisely, but is a body of water to be sure.[5] The first description of Maggie, most body-of-water-like, is focalized through the shopkeeper to whom she sells her flies:

> Her grey eyes, rimmed with dark lashes, were wide set and tranquil and her features were agreeably irregular. She was not beautiful; she was not plain. Yes, perhaps she was beautiful. . . . The drag of her cheap cloth coat and skirt intimated large easy curves beneath. (14)

She is "that calm placid Maggie" (41) in whom the memory of Eddie "recedes" (86) as if memory itself were liquid. A literal and figurative swimmer, Maggie "is contained by the sparkling surface of the lake and the pine tree shores and the low hills, and is covered by the sky" (99). And like water she aspires to be still, deep: "I must have things quiet, so that I can listen both ways" (19).

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4. . . . the limitless body of The Waves, the mountain lake into which Maggie tosses the revolver in Swamp Angel, the river in which Virginia Woolf drowned herself in 1941, the mountain lake where Ethel Wilson summered for some thirty years until the 1960s, or, at least, the inlet over which the Wilsons' Vancouver apartment always viewed.

5With Hélène Cixous: "[o]ur blood flows and we extend ourselves without ever reaching an end" (878).

Those eyes of hers--over and over their grey is remarkable. Grey water, ash-grey: the neutral mix of death and life, the aqueous solution, the grey-eyed Mrs. Ramsey of To the Lighthouse, the grey woman and grey light of Heroine.

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Happiness flows from Maggie, and "reache[s] and encompasse[s]" those around her (95)--a kind of neap-tide of spirit. Maggie "had no corners . . . she had a shining softness" (95) of water once again.

On the other hand, the "current" that flows from Vera (105) is a poisonous blend of jealousy, hatred and "hopes of failure" (84). Wilson is always careful to give us the dark side, the contrary flows, including, with her usual symbolic undertones (that aren't), darkness from light and fire from water. The dark side of water itself is recognized: "the lake . . . suddenly blossomed without warning into innocent beauty and shone with calm, deceitful as a witch" (133), the witch/innocent confrontation being played out between Maggie and Vera.

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Wilson favours that slightly archaic but once common verb: to divine. Characters in Swamp Angel are expert diviners who read (water), find out (where it is), measure (its flow)--all on a figurative level, of course. Maggie divines instantly the actions necessary to save the nearly-drowned Mr. Cunningham who was "as wet as a sponge" (135). She understands the ways of water, even its literal wet.

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The same "large and easy curves" that suggest Maggie's body are present beneath the surface of the writing itself in Swamp Angel:

> There is a beautiful action. It has an operative grace. It is when one, seeing some uneasy sleeper cold and without a cover, goes away, finds and brings a blanket, bends down, and covers the sleeper because the sleeper is a living being and is cold. He then returns to his work, forgetting that he has performed this small act of compassion. He will receive neither praise nor thanks. It does not matter who the sleeper may be. That is a beautiful action which is divine and human in posture and intention and self-forgetfulness. (91)

"Beautiful action" and "operative grace" indeed. At its best, Wilson's style, with its depth and shimmer and calmness and other attributes of water, matches her content most elegantly.

Other analogues for Wilson's style are available--Nell's juggling of the revolver, for one:

> Mrs. Severance twirled the Swamp Angel as if absent-mindedly, then like a juggler she tossed it spinning in the air, caught it with her little hand, tossed it again, higher, again, higher, spinning, spinning. It was a dainty easy practised piece of work. . . . (32)

And Joey, whose "nonchalant attitude [Maggie observes] had a certain grace. He was waiting for someone. He stepped quickly and lightly . . ." (25). Maggie likes in Joey what Wilson likes in her prose: his "quick yet lounging tread, his almost animal tread" (25).

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The literal flow in Swamp Angel occurs in the rivers and lakes that line Maggie's journey. Like most explorers, she follows the waterways. "Going fishing?" she is asked, four times

during the trip inland to the lake. She is, in a way, a water-way.[6]

If water is her Heaven as the novel opens, it takes Ten Steps to get there:

> She looked out over the small green garden which would soon grow dark in evening. This garden led down a few steps to the wooden sidewalk; then there was the road, dusty in fine weather; next came the neighbours' houses across the road, not on a level with her but lower, as the hill declined, so that she was able to look over the roofs of these houses to Burrard Inlet far below, to the dark green promontory of Stanley Park, to the elegant curve of the Lions Gate Bridge which springs from the Park to the northern shore which is the base of the mountains; and to the mountains. The mountains seemed, in this light, to rear themselves straight up from the shores of Burrard Inlet until they formed an escarpment along the whole length of the northern sky. The escarpment looked solid at times, but certain lights disclosed slope behind slope, hill beyond hill, giving an impression of the mountains which was fluid, not solid. (13)

Thereafter, the Fraser River is "never far distant" during her ride east out of Vancouver to Hope, and beyond, "at least as far as the river with the dancing name Similkameen" (36). She asks the bus driver "Will you set me down, please, somewhere near the river?" (37) and she "[gives] herself up" there to the first of a series of epiphanies. Later, after resuming her trip up the Fraser Canyon, she observes, near Lytton, the convergence of the Fraser and Thompson Rivers (in a passage which evokes all the connotations, for Maggie, of "convergence": balance of forces, balance of social interaction, balance). Finally, when she arrives at Three Loon Lake above Kamloops ("Meeting of the

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[6]As with Barthes' "text," Maggie's unity "lies not in its origin but in its destination" (148). That is, she can't make her catch until she gets there.

Waters," as it was called), the narration muses: "Meeting partakes in its very essence not only of the persons but of the place of meeting. And that essence of place remains, and colours, faintly, the association, perhaps for ever" (75). For Maggie, the place is water.

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Maggie's epiphanies are almost an embarrassment of "flow." Her three-day rebirth by the Similkameen River, for example, is an extended immersion in heightened sensory awareness, dissolution of time, dissolution of self and memory (". . . she was nothing. No thought, no memories occupied her . . ." (38)), "quick radiance," desolation and prayer, exhilaration, stillness and "a physical langour," "a lifting of her spirit to God by the river" (39), and a one-ness with fish and a doe. "These days had been for Maggie like the respite that perhaps comes to the soul after death" we are told (40), and the river flows through her all the while.

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Following Wilson further into metaphor, I note that water must define the island which "No man is," to cite the piece of Donne so favoured by Wilson that she uses it in her letters (Stouck 124), in the climactic speech of Nell to Maggie, and as the epigraph to her earlier novel, Hetty Dorval. Nell's advice to Maggie is that

> We are all in it together. 'No Man is an Iland, I am involved in mankinde,' and we have no immunity and we may as well realize it. You won't be immune ever, at that lake, Maggie (nor anywhere else, thought Maggie. No one is.) (150-51)

Nell also speaks of the "everlasting web," offering it as a substitute, one more water-like, for "island" as metaphor for a person's proper psycho-social location in the world.

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Joe's word flows:

> Joe's word ran throughout these connecting rooms where his children slept, played, studied, and ate, and it flowed up and down the stairs and into the taxi office, and sometimes onto the sidewalk outside the door where he often stood surveying the scene--always changing, always the same. . . . (42)

Wilson's portrait of the Chinese family is a positive one. The narrator admires their harmony (not an easy quality for other characters to achieve), the "healthy" drifting in and out of the extended family. The Hilda-Nell, Maggie-Eddie, Haldar-Vera families stick out: they're so uncommunicative, so static, so dry.

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The countryside flows, is "rippling, flowing" (55). Maggie wonders: "What will it mean, all this country? Flowing, melting, rising, obliterating . . ." (57). The narration wants to make water of land--wants, as Maggie does, to melt the stasis of social, even topographic, forms. Add chronology to that list of forms made fluid: time is also a flow "in this place," the lake (108). The half-dozen Moments of epiphany (at least "bonding," at least mystical dalliance) in Swamp Angel swirl time in appropriate radiance, in glorious obliteration.

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Power flows from Nell--the power of her gun, the Swamp Angel, which she uses to emphasize her warning to Eddie Vardoe

not to pursue Maggie. But her essential power lives up to her own name: Severance. She's a closer (to borrow a term normally applied to late-inning relief pitchers); she knows how to make an ending, the right psychological closure. "I am going to bring you salvation if you want it," she warns the distraught Eddie Vardoe. "You've got a new life ahead [. . .] if you'll do as I say" (49). And she says; she commands him out of his bitter, potentially violent state on to that new life.

In the "deeply significant closing act" (82) of her own life, Nell sends the Swamp Angel up to Maggie. The package "contained her life," but she is stoic and fairly cheerful as she sees it off, imagining the gun sinking where Maggie is to throw it: in "the deepest part of your lake" (82).

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Communications flow "above and around" Mr. Cunningham (132), who receives the characteristics of the ideal social being. He enters the flow of social interaction with considerable grace but at the same time is "unnoticeable," contemplative and, like all fly-fishermen, desirous of being "apart, solitary upon the lake" (133). Maggie heads toward such a state herself, riding the bus north towards Kamloops, but the stream that "flow[s] on" beside her is someone's annoying babble--nothing so refined, so properly balanced, as Cunningham's elegant drift.

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Warm air flows, of course, adding its name to the catalogue of agents in the world of flow. Colour, too--the colour that "flowed over Maggie's face and stained her neck" with pleasure

(139). (I think of the variable colours of a lake, the merging colours at a confluence of two rivers). At the end of the novel, when she approaches the lake one last time, the colours "had begun to flow" over the hills, joining other elements: "Breathe this sagey air! See, a bluebird! Floating cloud, drifting scent, tree, wild creature, curving fleeting hill--each made its own statement to Maggie" (155). Each, then, speaks of the kind of integration she has been drifting toward all novel long.

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Across Reference: A *Heroine* Dictionary[1]

> words entangled with other words in so many alliances and antipathies during their perpetual knocking about the world that the idiomatic use of them is far from easy.
>
> (Preface to First Edition, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*)

> Even words in storage, in the dictionary, seem frenetic with activity, as each individual entry attracts to itself other words as definition, example, amplification.
>
> (Lyn Hejinian, "The Rejection of Closure")

beginning (see **body, spiral, text**)

1 "the beginning: language, a living body we enter at birth" (Marlatt 45), and: "language is larger than us and carries us along with it" (46). Since reality is born in language, political action like the writing of *Heroine* begins with action in the *language*.[2]

2 (ironic:) *Heroine*'s "Beginning" consists of one of many

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[1] A "dictionary" of selected words for which the structure of "entries" (and exits--the French word *sortie* works nicely for both) and cross-references, acknowledged but abbreviated, is provided by convention. Within each entry, the dictionary discourse (including the convention of "definition") shall be retained or abandoned as required.

[2] *Heroine*, in other words, is highly-charged with the politics of language, gender, writing. Yet the day we talked about *Heroine* in a graduate seminar, someone said (referring to a petition against the visit of a representative of the South African government) "Why don't we just leave politics out of the seminar room?" This said with *Heroine* in his hands!

"Black tourist" scenes, followed by one of many "I"-in-a-bathtub scenes, and since linear chronology is downplayed (see **time**), Scott's novel seems not to begin at all. Unbegun, it begs for the un- of -winding, and is off on its "cyclical ascension, and descent" (Scott, Spaces 124)[3] (see **spiral**). There is narrative in Heroine--"some thread to which the reader may cling" (Scott, SLS 78)--but it does not require, and in fact is denied, a "beginning."[4]

3 Luce Irigaray links "beginning and end" with "the linearity of an outline, the teleology of discourse, within which there is no possible place for the "feminine," except the traditional place of the repressed, the censured" (68).

body (see **beginning, writing, heroine**)

1 The body is literally (clitorally) close at hand as the narrator masturbates under a jet of water in the bathtub, a scene that almost always follows within a few lines of the

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[3]Gail Scott's collection of essays, Spaces Like Stairs [hereafter cited as SLS], includes an essay called "Paragraphs Blowing On A Line" (78-104) which, Scott writes, is a "diary [that] was written over the years I worked on my novel Heroine" (79). Her essay provides a sure and revealing a commentary on her novel; one is "an illuminating countertext" of the other.

[4]I am reminded, however, of the structure of Virginia Woolf's To the Lighthouse (I. The Window. II. Time Passes. III. The Lighthouse). The three sections of Heroine are I. Beginning. II. [untitled]. III Ending. There is, in both texts, the obvious narrative in the sense of movement forward in time, but the movements are far from linear. Both texts also share a range of "focal length," as it might be called, implied by the window/lighthouse for Woolf and the viewpoint/bathtub for Scott. Scott's heroine gathers material for her novel by looking out the window (79).

"Black tourist" and, before that, spaces on the page. I take the following comment of Luce Irigaray's, then, to serve as a description of both a key structural feature of Heroine (its starting over, its setting off again) and the body's way of informing whatever else is being talked about:

> For in what she says, too, at least when she dares, woman is constantly touching herself. She steps ever so slightly aside from herself with a murmur, an exclamation, a whisper, a sentence unfinished . . . When she returns it is to set off again from elsewhere. From another point of pleasure, or of pain. One would have to listen with another ear, as if hearing an 'other meaning' always in the process of weaving itself [. . .]. What she says [. . .] is contiguous. It touches (upon). And when it strays too far from that proximity she breaks off and starts over at "zero": her body-sex. (29, her emphasis)

2 It is the body to which the narrative (a narrative re turning) turns back: the body as center, as point, as beginner.

3 Language "is both place (where we are situated) and body (that which contains us)" (Marlatt 45), and "sustains" the speaking "I" (functions fulfilled by the bathtub in Heroine).

4 "And why don't you write? Write! Writing is for you, you are for you; your body is yours, take it," writes Helene Cixous (876), in a call for corpus and corporality to which Heroine actively responds. Ils savent prendre des risques avec le corps (Heroine 112)[5] I freely translate as They know how to take risks with writing.

5 She has to "pull herself together" from under the "froth, fall[ing] gently now on my small point" to "get a fix on the

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[5]Subsequent references to Heroine shall be cited parenthetically, where necessary, as H.

heroine" of her novel (60-1). Such links between body and "inspiration" in the conventional sense, between what's happening with her body and what's happening with her novel, show where the writing comes from and how it comes: "Oh, the water's getting cold. I'll have to get out soon. If I can manage just a tickle, it's a sign I'll write the novel. A certain rigidity of the body also precedes explosion" (50).

6 Nicole Brossard's cross-referencing in "Poetic Politics" is that "[t]his word ["body"] is usually accompanied by the words writing and text" (73).

city (see **text, writing, body, intertextuality**)

1 The sensuousness of Heroine is, for Scott herself, "the poetry--and the voraciousness--of the city" (SLS 79). The city is a "tapestry" (SLS 83), suggesting the etymology of text: to weave. Scott's writing (including her narrative "thread") must achieve that "hot autumn" texture, the grit of the street, the fragrance and sensuality, the solution of writing, body and air.

2 Heroine is one of

> these modernist texts [. . .] testifying to the form emotion and thought have taken over the last thirty years. Emotion which, need I add, in Quebec is distinctly related to urban life. For the city concentrates energy; it calls for fiction, ellipsis, and theory, not to mention the politicization of texts. (Brossard 71)

3 The "mean streets" view of a woman's Montreal:

> The streets are a spectacle which her body takes in. The female body, fragmented, in pain, its cells reaching out to all the other fragmented, pained bodies, the women, the poor, the effects of les restes de colonization, is sometimes literally splayed over the city. Bodies talking. Taking refuge in the warmth

and safety of cafes. (SLS 96)

difference (see **subject, writing**)

1 These pairs of terms from Heroine describe not oppositions but points on that spiral the heroine careers along:

personal needs	need for Quebecois revolution
unconscious	objective condition of existence
woman passes	thin men eyeing her
change the world	have love too
the future	nostalgia
political action	pure theatre
positive feminist persona	world going to hell
look so cool	behave so unmodern
external image	internal desolation
duty	novel
political	personal
egoism	responsibility to feminism and the left
love	freedom
the sadness	the beauty
progress	melancholy
bright hard edge of future	dark side
sisterhood	art

Heroine heeds Louise Forsyth's caution against "a logic which opposes the seeing subject and the external object" (18).

2 Although at one point the heroine "waver[s] between two contradictory aims" (H 120), she finds herself rather mired, at that point, in her love affair, elsewhere dismissed as "melancholic heterosexual shit" (148). Generally, Heroine enacts one more of the important points made by Hélène Cixous:

> To admit that writing is precisely working (in) the in-between, inspecting the process of the same and of the other without which nothing can live, undoing the work of death--to admit this is first to want the two, as well as both, the ensemble of the one and the other, not fixed in sequences of struggle and expulsion or some other form of death but infinitely dynamized by an incessant process of exchange from one subject to another. A process of different subjects knowing one another and beginning one another anew only from the living boundaries of the other: a multiple and inexhaustible course with millions of

> encounters and transformations of the same into the other and into the in-between, from which woman takes her forms. ("Medusa" 883)

This working the in-between is played out in the persons of Marie (shell of elegance/ perfect surface/ perceptive mind/ toughness) and the grey woman (a baglady). Both are repeatedly acknowledged: Marie in dialogue, the grey woman as anonymous figure in the middle distance (who nevertheless is present only nine lines from the novel's end). Each is (one of) the heroine(s).

focus (see **writing, image, subject, city**)

1 "We concentrate avidly on the processes. Of writing, of desirous being, of ecstasy. We concentrate a great deal on the self," writes Nicole Brossard (67). "Shh," the narrator of Heroine repeatedly tells herself, "I can't focus on the euphoria." She is one of Brossard's women who "make use of a sensual and cerebral capacity which lends itself to a form of original concentration" (Brossard 85-6) called, elsewhere, "the thought of emotion and the emotion of thought" (Brossard 76). But "I had a little trouble concentrating on my writing" (H 73) and, in fact, she watches her own focus all the way through both the text she is writing and the text, Heroine, in which she is written: "a person just keeps checking her performance from all angles" (131)

2 Eyes narrowing in concentration (108). Like Woolf's window again: the point of seeing out and seeing in.

3 etym.: the point at which rays meet, the "hearth" or "fire,".

the centre of fire. Thus, focusing as centering, finding focus as starting fire: "focus on my writing."

4 See the mechanical side of the "focus" image: telescope, still camera, movie camera, lens. This sequence from Heroine is typical:

> In the telescope the plain whitens. The Black tourist sees a field of car wrecks below the skyscrapers. A woman is walking towards a park bench. Suddenly she sits, pulling her coat down in the front and up in the back in a single gesture so you can hardly tell she's taking a pee.
>
> Oh faucet your warm stream is linked to my smiling face. (16)

There are at least four points here: (a) the wider focus: the tourist, a man, gazing . . . [not voyeuristically]; the medium focus: the grey woman, a baglady, who later takes her place within the range of possibilities; the narrow focus: the narrator, her "series of bird's-eye views from the bathtub" (SLS 86). (b) Who's viewin' whom: A woman "comes to consider the surveyor and the surveyed within her as the two constituent yet always distinct elements of her identity as woman" (John Berger, Ways of Seeing, qtd. in Hutcheon 45). Woman, here, is both the wide and narrow focus (and the medium in between). She is, then, the city which the tourist surveys through the telescope. (c) Again, the body as the literal point drawing the focus to itself: "Oh froth, your warm faucet's spurting warmly over my uh small point" (H 36). (d) The sudden jumps from focus to focus like the sudden jumps across gaps within self.

heroine (see **beginning, subject, spiral**)

1 "The heroine radiating from the middle of the story" (H 42)

is thus identified as a "center" but, it must be remembered, the structural "shape" of this novel is a spiral. If the spiral has a center, it is to be mobile in displacing itself, constantly in motion. The radiating waves: tub as orgasmic center, body as origin, "The best of me is here" (H 60).

2 Heroine = protector(?): "I'm so pissed off about having to worry about self-protection."[6]

image (see **subject, writing, beginning, difference**)

1 The future is a player in Heroine, after Cixous' desire to "foresee the unforeseeable, to project" (875). "The point is we have to create new images of ourselves even if at first they're superficial, in order to move forward," "Gail" says in Heroine (28), offering the result of Luce Irigaray's condition: "[I]f the female imaginary were to deploy itself [. . .]" (30).

2 A birth-image: "If the dawn of new paradigms is to occur, in whose light women's subjectivity can function, we must literally

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[6]Spoken by a friend in the English Department. I had first read Heroine just after the killing of fourteen women in Montreal. The day my graduate seminar was to talk about Scott's text was the very day--the very afternoon, hour--I heard the story from my friend of how a pathologically-obsessed man had tracked her down in Edmonton. She had changed the locks in her apartment, had taken an unlisted number at home, had notified Campus Security, etc. When the phone rang in her locked office as we talked, she asked me to answer it in case the guy was on the line. "Would you be scared?" she asked me. In the moments during which I considered my answer to that question, I was struck--and I mean that I was shocked by the realization--that I have absolutely no way of appreciating what it is like to be a woman. A layer of eeriness was added by the fact that Heroine, sitting on the pile of books beside me as we talked, contains a startlingly similar incident (163-64) of a woman pursued, harrassed, threatened.

give birth to ourselves" (Forsyth 22). (See Marlatt (49): "language as birthing").

3 A crucial exchange with Marie (the ideal) touches the anxiety about **image**:

> 'C'est que tu ne sembles pas pouvoir faire coincider du tout qu'est-ce que tu vois comme vie possible avec qu'est-ce tu es, qu'est-ce tu vis actuellement. You almost said it earlier: it's as if the words or maybe even the syntax have to be invented to close the space between what you're living now and future possibilities. Your life is an illustration of this problem. Yes, with you it's very obvious, very painful.' (H 130).

Depression, melancholy, the pain of imaging, the difficulty of imagining. While "my heroine has to finally face her pain, uncensored by her feminist consciousness" (SLS 104), the novel moves towards a new image--opening out, not closing in. "Maybe" appears three times in the last dozen or so lines of the novel as she considers alternatives, and "wondering," "question," and "is it possible" once each. In "grey light," she looks "to the left, the right," before the final word: "She-." The writing stops as "she" does, but her steps further into the "middle" of new possibilities have been implied.

intertextuality (see **body, spiral, beginning**)

1 The structure of Heroine came as "the fruit of my own hard thinking, and a considerable process of intertextuality, especially with other women's work," Gail Scott writes in an essay (SLS 103-4). Similar comments about community appear in the texts of almost every other feminist theorist named in this paper.

2 "For in the beginning of the body's history there is no beginning. There is a body folded inside a body wrapped around an/other body--all bodies breathing the body of language" (Kamboureli 31).

spiral (see **intertextuality, writing, body**)

1 Gail Scott, formerly a contributing editor of a newspaper called Spirale, writes, "My prose writing becomes part of a spiral-like movement, linked in space and time to the work of other women elsewhere. It IS and is more exalted because it's part of a community" (SLS 40).

2 Nicole Brossard draws a picture, an "Aerial Vision," of the "spiral's sequences in its energy and movement towards a female culture" (116-17).[7]

3 Daphne Marlatt suggests the spiral in her question "how can the standard sentence structure of English with its linear authority [. . .] convey the wisdom of endlessly repeating and not exactly repeated cycles her body knows" (Marlatt 47).

4 The spiral figure is offered by Shirley Neuman and Smaro Kamboureli in their Preface to A Mazing Space: Writing Canadian Woman Writing: "[T]he essays collected here," they write, are

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[7]Her six sequences are (1) women's invisibility in the schematic of "Sense"; (2) new sense within Sense; (3) beginning of spiralic movement within Sense; (4) work done on the "dangerous zone" at the edge of Sense; (5) a "questing" through non-sense and "renewal" of Sense; (6) "new perspectives": "Female culture, whose existence essentially depends on our incursions into the territory until today held by non-sense," an idea reiterated by Irigaray: "What is important is [. . .] disrupting and modifying [phallocratic order], starting from an "outside" that is exempt, in part, from phallocratic law" (68).

> events in the unwinding spiral of woman's writing in Canada, moments of pause in that unwinding in which the writers and critics look back at their tradition and look forward to works yet to be written. Other writers, other readers have paused, will yet pause, at other and different moments as that spiral contines to unfurl . . . (xi, their ellipsis)[8]

subject (see **writing, difference, image**)

1 Among "feminists interested in modernity," Scott writes,

> the universality of the writing subject (and the degree of its author-ity in relationship to the writing) cannot be assumed--since many women have a sense of being already fragmented, alienated male fictions. MY desire was to create a new female subject-in-process through the act of writing. (SLS 62)

"By your own words you may start to live," advises Marie (H 172).

2 "(Re-)discovering herself, for a woman," means "never being simply one. [. . .] Woman always remains several, but she is kept from dispersion because the other is already within her and autoerotically familiar to her" (Irigaray 31). Cixous, in "Sorties," echoes this idea and extends it:

> [T]here is no invention possible, whether it be philosophical or poetic, without the presence in the inventing subject of an abundance of the other, of the diverse: persons-detached, persons-thought, peoples born of the unconscious, and in each desert, suddenly animated, a springing forth of self that we did not

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[8]I found their comment encouraging as I began to write this paper because it named a place for me as one of those other readers/writers. And the spiralic effect of writing about Heroine--it was difficult to write "body" without writing "language" soon thereafter, and "image" soon after that, then "body" again, and "writing" and so on, over and over again, and, in general, writing about Scott meant writing about texts of Marlatt, Brossard, Cixous and others--led me to adapt the arbitrary distinctions of (supposedly) discrete dictionary entries.

know about--our women, our monsters, our jackals, our Arabs, our fellow-creatures, our fears. (97)

3 "Gail," the heroine, names herself or the image of herself (sometimes ironically in either case) as:

a modern woman in the present
a smart woman
a creative woman
a woman who maintains her equilibrium
a progressive, non-possessive woman
a satisfied woman
an artist
a good revolutionary
a bourgeois woman
a feminist
a member of the avant-garde
a heroine
a sensitive, progressive woman--

--all those subjects--but is (self-)narrated as subject to:

the feminist nemesis [constricting love]
les airs d'une tragedie
depression
melodrama
pessimism
melancholy
something very traditional
something so romantic
sentimentality
nostalgia

via the voices of her lover, her analyst, her groups (surrealism, left, F-, writing, lesbian), her parents, her friend Marie, and her silent auditor named Sepia. She is "working on" an image (H 62); Heroine is a series of workings-out of subjectivities or searches for balances (not the one balance of a text such as Swamp Angel). Scott's multiple subject[s] -in-the-feminine (SLS 124) is her heroine, her set of heroines.

text (see **writing, spiral, body, city**)

1 "The textual site has become the repository for the body,

sex, the city, and rupture, as well as the theory that it generates, which in turn regenerates text" (Brossard 69). With Brossard, and with Heroine, it is appropriate to re-cite a selection of elements of Barthes' "ideal text," which he posits first as

> the image of a triumphant plural [. . .]. In this ideal text, the networks are many and interact [. . .] it has no beginning, it is reversible; we gain access to it by several entrances [. . .] the systems of meaning can take over this absolutely plural text, but their number is never closed, based as it is on the infinity of language. (5-6)

2 Textuality as name: "Tessera, textera. If you change the double "s" to an "x", you have the text and the spinning thing, the weaving thing, together" (Godard et al., "Sp/elle" 6).

time

1 The "story" sketches a period of approximately ten years; the narration takes a few hours in a bathtub (although the narration is mobile and multi-levelled).

2 The ironic references to passing time--"Tis a grey day"; "Twas November"--acknowledge (her subversion of) time as it is represented in conventional narratives. But the heroine clearly favours Janis Joplin's "it's all the same goddamned day" (a link, again, with Virginia Woolf, for whom any moment or event is implicitly linked with all other moments or events).

3 Sepia, the photo/memory/internal addressee, activates the discourse of remembering, a discourse which confronts both "the time of linear history" and "the time of another history"--the latter "[a]ll-encompassing and infinite like imaginary space"

(Kristeva 14). This "double movement," as Gail Scott calls it,

> has something to do with trying to confront past and present at once. I don't only want her memories, i.e., how she got into the tub. But also for the text to have a running self-reflexive commentary about now. As in a kind of poetic essay about women today; or in the way poets insert the everyday in their texts. (SLS 82)

There is memory, even nostalgia, in Heroine, as well as the relentless, tub-centered now.

textu(re)ality (see all else)

1 The melange in Heroine's writing--a world of text, texture and reality which, as Louise Forsyth says of Brossard's writing, "considers ideas and concepts as inseparable from imagination and is rooted always in the material reality of the world as known by sensation and experience, and never in logic alone" (Forsyth 14):

> I cross the street. [. . .] I move behind a stunning woman, whose high cheekbones and blonde colouring indicate French and Irish blood. Wanting to see what makes her tick. The crowd presses my nose closer to her golden sheen of curls. [. . .] The air smells of people, her perfume and the earth swelling due to irrigation from spring run-off. I feel euphoric. My nose moves closer to her wall of silk. [. . .] A slight breeze shifts the sheen of her brightly coloured hair. The blue air charged with the smell of rapidly melting snow reverberates against my skin. The word EUPHORIA has grown so large across my mind I have to write. (H 62-63)

. . the "incredible provocation of spring air" (98):

> 4:30 PM. He's leaving my flat. I try to focus. But the air is exploding in bright flashes. So I can hardly make clear the edge of his thighs encased in his tight jeans. The euphoria is as though I've crossed the bar of light.
>
> 6 PM. You come home and I'm lying on the sofa, kind of sheepish. What a day. The sun shining on the floor. That recurring image of N's and my body tingling until they dissolve in the dazzling air. (103-4)

The body of air or air mass, spring "as fast as an orgasm"

(146) . . .

2 solution: (the set of heroines seeking a solution (as fluid mix) without the solution (as final answer).

writing (see **image, text, subject, difference**)

1 "To write in the feminine then perhaps means that women must work at making their own hope and history, in the one place where these can take shape, where there is textual matter" (Brossard 76). "I know that to write is to bring oneself into being" (139), which is, of course, a serious matter: "as feminists, our responsibility is writing" (M 113).

2 Because, Brossard adds, "what is important at the present time is that women write, aware that their difference must be explored in the knowledge of themselves who have become subjects, and further, subjects involved in a struggle" (qtd. in Forsyth 12).

Orlando

An Autobiography

Edited with an Introduction by Gerald Hill

Introduction

Poetry is both vehicle and object of Orlando's central desire. In thus agreeing with part of Susan Squier's view of Orlando I am nevertheless inclined to ring a few changes on her "making of a writer" tag.[1] Orlando, then, is the making of writing, the writing that makes Orlando, Orlando making herself in writing, etc.--all ways to name writing as both subject and object, the maker and the made. The narrator's question, "Was not writing poetry a secret transaction, a voice answering a voice?" (203), supports this view of poetry as both vehicle and object. The same word, voice, occupies either end of the line of desire. Orlando is filled with, in fact driven by, voice, desire, and poetry.

The flow from action to reflection, society to solitude, and public duty to private exploration creates the rhythm in Orlando. Orlando acts out that rhythm in his various descents into silence or solitude and in his ascents, some of them abrupt, into action.

---

[1]Other descriptions of Orlando are also true enough, in my view, as far as they go: biography of Vita Sackville-West (Daiches 97), or memorial mass for her (Nicolson 82); history of the Sackvilles at Knole (Lee 143); satire on traditional biography (Lee 142); caricature (Graham 101); brilliant comic fantasy (Schlack 77); imaginative literary and social history of England (Trautmann 85); a document of "feminist spirit" (Samuelson 55); "tedious high camp" (Showalter 291) (although I see virtuosity instead of tedium); and so on.

These transition moments when Orlando "fall[s] into one of his moods of melancholy" (29) or when in five sentences he's up and off to Constantinople (74) mark breaking points in his life-long tension: the moves away from or back to the essential business of poetry.

A look through the novel's final ten pages allows us to trace the end stages of what has been desired and desiring throughout the text. The awarding a prestigious prize for poetry is clearly not, to the dismay of Orlando's "biographer," "this peroration with which the book was to end" (195).

Indeed, Orlando speaks of something more:

> 'Haunted!' she cried, suddenly pressing the accelerator. 'Haunted! ever since I was a child. There flies the wild goose. [. . .] Always it flies fast out to sea and always I fling after it words like nets [. . .] and sometimes there's an inch of silver--six words--in the bottom of the net. But never the great fish who lives in the coral groves' (195-196).

She is a writer, whose life is a chase for meaning (more or less). It is a wild goose chase, admittedly, but worthy results are achieved:

> The whole of her darkened and settled, as when some foil whose addition makes the round and solidity of a surface is added to it, and the shallow becomes deep and the near distant; and all is contained as water is contained by the sides of a well. So she was now darkened, stilled, and become, with the addition of this Orlando, what is called, rightly or wrongly, a single self, a real self. And she fell silent. (196)

That is profound psychological integration. Surely such integration is what Orlando has always desired, especially following several pages of discussion about "the chopping up small of identity" (192) and her reprise of all her three hundred years' worth of selves.

But Orlando herself, now fully whole as she arrives in the country, is apparently yet unfinished, notwithstanding her fluid mind "that flowed round things and enclosed them completely" (196) and her notice of how "when the shrivelled skin of the ordinary is stuffed out with meaning it satisfies the senses amazingly" (197). Gently, lovingly, somewhat gloomily, Orlando visits the house for the last time--an occasion for another catalogue of selves. Her vision of the great house, like her vision of her unified self, is accompanied by a calm beating silence, by "great wings of silence" (199) in fact.

Now, moving to the garden, she keeps "complete composure" and is "one and entire" (200). Even the "pressure of the present" can be faced directly, if barely: "The tension [is] too relentless" (200); there is "something strange in the shadow that the flicker of her eyes cast." The shadow fixes its depth on the moment: "I am about to understand. . ." (201).

The shadow deepens (as the ending continues) "at the back of her brain [. . .] into a pool where things dwell in darkness so deep that what they are we scarcely know" (201). There, the narrator reflects, is the source of art. In this darkness, a state of dissolution,

> everything was partly something else; as if her mind had become a forest with glades branching here and there; things came nearer, and further, and mingled and separated and made the strangest alliances and combinations in an incessant chequer of light and shade. (202)

Orlando's path, we see now, is leading to the oak, always a place of solitude and silence, and to her manuscript "The Oak Tree." She takes the view--another reprise of times and places,

glimpses of fragments of selves--until the present cracks back into place, and maturity of self and artist is again expressed:

> Night had come--night that she loved of all times, night in which the reflections in the dark pool of the mind shine more clearly than by day. It was not necessary to faint now in order to look deep into the darkness where things shape themselves (204).

"Ecstasy!" she cries, "ecstasy!", and there follows a last spiral of feather, leaves, the Queen again, darkness, clouds, the moon, "Here!", a flare in darkness, once more the wild bird and finally the utter present.

The "long vistas [have] steadily shrunk together" (191) at the end of Orlando. The parody/fantasy elements have faded away or been completed before the final push toward the self and toward the wild goose of poetry.

Gerald Hill, Edmonton, April 1989-July 1990

Orlando

An Autobiography

Chapter One

Orlando sits down at his table to write . . .

I begin with a writing book (in which these very words are entered) and a stained goose quill and ink and a laurel bush just there beneath the window. This attic room fills with as many sounds and sights as I care to name and my desire drifts in the silent, scented air . . . and here is my horrid Tragedy, ten more pages; I write as easily as blink my foolish eyes. But this is language not my own. These are not my words: the bees among the flowers, the yawning dog, the laurel green. I cannot place them on my page. I drop my pen and write no more.

Orlando practices solitude . . .

Better. Stealing out the garden gate, hiding, gaining the path uphill through the park. Alone at the crown of the world's highest place where a single oak tree stands, a spine. Alone with a view, I see simply everything: nineteen counties, single waves in the Channel, distant cities, smoke and meadows, clouds among mountains, and my summer heart's reach for it all.

Orlando meets the Queen . . .

The Queen sees poetry in me--whatever she means by that, for she penetrates my boyish rhymes and conceits. What is in me?

I see her ringed hand in a bowl of rose water. Her hand has the look itself of ogres, depths of the sea--of everything I do not know. And I am to be her oak tree, the clear air amid her camphored brocade! She is to be the whole of me, I suppose, for my mind is a clatter of fragments.

Orlando meets the great poet . . .

I see just the hint of a poet; that is, the dirty-ruffed fellow has not the look of a poet, except in his eyes, which heave about as if bobbed on the thickest fluid, and in his hands, which wring from one another the terrible twists of a heavy line. But a poet! Tell me, I want to say to him, what is.

Orlando seeks low company in the beer gardens at night . . .

For love of language. The sailors know the colour of foreign tongues, the rhythms before meaning, the spoken story shadowing the written. Even their parakeets squawk and peck with their hard beaks at the brittle snows of poetry like mine.

Orlando beholds an extraordinarily seductive figure emerging from the Muscovite Embassy . . .

The page is the only plane on which I may hope to find equilibrium--this moment, these vast moments, a carnival of sensations when I rise to her and embrace the very light by which we see. Every fruit tastes of her, and every animal moves as she does, a white Russian fox on the snow. What use is my writing in the face of this ecstasy known as love?

My words fall as I fall; they persist as I do. Words are

everything, but it is nothing that gives them--nothing but the pain of my own labour and the silence of her response.

Orlando, in love, chooses . . .

If I flew from poetry as easily as I would from my Lady Euphrosyne, to whom I am betrothed, I would never write again or would sit looking, but never breaking the surface of the page.

But Sasha . . . Since I find no words to praise her I offer grass and waters and spring in the hope that such bare terms will grow a field of images in which to lie or take cover. Sasha likewise praises my radiance, a lamp lit within.

Orlando falls into one of his moods . . .

Tonight, "Othello." Whether because of the language, which accumulates in fragments, or because of the visual frenzy of the suffocation scene, I see again that all grows dark and ends in the obvious word: death. This is my melancholy, this is my night, my poet's dark way. The London night explodes and fades.

Orlando, in love, loses . . .

All is black. I confess to the riot and confusion of the water's sudden flood. All rationality sweeps by in the current where my passionate and feeling heart swirls. In an appalling race of waters my world rushes by. Sasha, the deceiver, has gone no matter how long I stand calling after her. My words, having lost their moorings, wash away. And now what magic must I make of a broken pot at my feet and a little straw?

Chapter Two

Orlando chooses solitude in his great country house and shows no sign of life for seven days . . .

What has happened in the seven days between midnight and dawn? The shock of experience, perhaps, suddenly breaking something away? I recollect the past imperfectly; the past in fact dies with me in my sleep, recreating something new.

Upon waking, I pace galleries and ballrooms looking for likenesses I cannot find; sit alone for hours in the chapel watching the moonlight; fill myself with death and decay; walk among the bones in the crypt; pace again the galleries, looking for something among the pictures; declare life worthless; cry--I do nothing but desire . . . the woman, that woman. . . . My own sorrow composes itself; I do not write a word.

Orlando reads to write . . .

If I admit to a love of literature I admit in the first place to a thousand raptures, simple as a turning page. (I shall have to further admit, parenthetically, that even before books I loved the necessary pre-condition of silence into which they open). I live again for the heights of those moments, and touching down on great patches of solitude I shall become myself a writer--shall become, that is, both myself and a writer. Sad to say, I do not yet reproduce these raptures by my own pen, but desire and solitude shall feed one another until . . . here I leave off speculation, for a cabinet full of manuscripts calls--may I politely suggest it?--for publication.

Orlando pauses for Ambition and Fame . . .

I vow to keep out anything but that which makes my greatness. I have seen the deeds of my ancestors, the portraits of their conquests, victims, fates. If one deed ranks above them all it shall be my poetry. The one poet shall be me; I vow that by writing I am doing what is far more necessary than anything else can be. I shall write and be forever read.

At the same time I must know if my work has merit. Has solitude dulled the edges of my genius?

Orlando delivers his work to the hands of a famous poet . . .

I begin to see, having learned what I could from Nicholas Greene for six weeks, that most of the great poetry ever written was in fact extracted from the random droppings of the sacred beast I had imagined poetry to be. Moreover, the great poets themselves--far from stately men of bold imagination and noble discourse--can be found in any tavern, calling forth their noisy poems as they might call forth another ale. Accordingly, they suffer perpetually, from excesses of ale rather than from tormented access to the Muse, and must whinge and whine for hours on end in order to live their lives as poets. Still, I hesitate to ask a famous poet for his opinion of my work; I have little to offer in return. Ah, my patronage. He accepts, of course.

Orlando experiences rejection . . .

Nothing any reviewer says can possibly have any effect on me whatsoever. But I have done with all men. And I have

burned my complete poetical works. All but "The Oak Tree."

Orlando takes time . . .

It is clear by all I see of my life that I make time and time makes me, and alone here on a mound under the oak tree I form, from the rush of time's expansion or contraction, my questions of the world: What is love, or friendship? Truth? What is metaphor or poetry? By such questions I direct myself . . . if I could only answer them. Where are my words.

"Bad poetry," Mrs. Woolf says, "is almost always the result of forgetting oneself." It is true. I shall write, from this day forward, to remember myself and to please only me.

I say out with Fame (the light) and into Obscurity (the dark) where my mind and voice can take their disinterested course. Let me make waves, not to influence the outside world but to lose my place among them--anonymous, generous, free.

Orlando furnishes his mansion . . .

There, as if immortal, lies my house. No pets or Russian Princesses, just the cedar and rosewood and carpets around me, and the hundreds of rooms, hundreds of parts of myself made orderly, symmetrical, glowing, shining, noble, humane, content. As for entertainments, they are splendid to be sure. I'm the toast of the nobility, the center of a ring of raised glass.

And silently, privately, "The Oak Tree, A Poem" is written. It makes itself stronger now and teaches me to write.

Chapter Three

Orlando, having awoken in Constantinople from another seven-day trance, becomes a woman . . .

It will be said I have undergone the most profound of transformations. But have I not always acted something of both man and woman? May not my Turkish trousers be worn indifferently by either sex? Will it ever be shown that gender is of any concern to "The Oak Tree"?

The Turks have risen against the Sultan. The old man with a donkey waits to take me into the desert. I leave all my Ambassadorial documents behind. My business now is unofficial: the manuscript, folded in the bosom of my cloak, all I need.

Orlando, a Gypsy, desires home . . .

The gypsies are quite correct. I prefer a sunset to a flock of goats. That is, I love the goats, the sheepskins and baskets but I must have more: silence and other emptiness, an eternity of stillness and all that is in there, ready for me to name. I must write; I must return home. A summer's day in England. I go.

Chapter Four

Orlando dons the dark garments of the female sex . . .

Praise God that I'm a poet, I cry, after the distraction of gender--what mine is, what it means. Praise God, I suppose then, that I'm a woman (but damn this coil of skirts about my legs) and thus excluded from processions, war, power. In place of love

of power give me love, which is poetry (here, its pages hidden in my bosom). The poet's is the greatest known ecstasy.

Orlando reflects . . .

I mature: to be able to catalogue the progress of my own self along my own past beginning with the sound, the body of sound, I entered as a boy. As for the future, Heaven only knows. I haven't written it yet. I'm in the process of fabrication; I'm not yet done being changed, changing being. "The whole world is a work of art", says Mrs. Woolf.

Chapter Five

Orlando strays into the park alone . . .

I speak of another of my deaths: a feather falls as it has fallen all these ages towards the present, the feather of a wild bird. I collect it and the others that fall as if the bird itself will be made by the sum of all feathers. The world is forgetfulness, a feather on my brow! the weight of falling with enough of them; ecstasy accumulates as passing time and feathers, wet, a darkness bound for the heartbeat: earth.

Orlando begins her death . . .

There is much else to set down in order to mark the time as it is happening in brightness or shadow, in stillness or confusion, song or in prayer, being or non-being, solitude or with mate, joined or in fragments, in silence or noise--all a flock

of matched birds in a clutter over a tree. They will settle I am sure. This is vision. The details fall away on either side.

Chapter Six

Orlando meets her next blank page. . .

I wish, more than anything else in the world, to write poetry. And I am feeling closer to my self, as part of but greater than the spirit of the age. Still the doubts (as adverbial); still the doubts (as verb phrase). Here at my table with cigarette, ink pot and pen, how do I bring the page to life when all I can do is blow my nose, stir the fire and look out of the window? Nothing is simple.

Orlando nears the end . . .

Done! I have just finished, with this nib-ful of ink, the last line of "The Oak Tree," just in time to save it from extinction. I have finished "The Oak Tree" and--surely my imagination flares--I sense that nothing in the world could be finished without me but look there is the garden and there the bird and the world has continued through my writing.

I hear a pot break against a river bank; the present moment is ever at hand, a narrow plank above a raging torrent. I am precisely as here and now as any number (no precise proportions exist) of theres and thens.

Orlando relieves her poem of its desire . . .

Sir Nicholas Greene, opportunist, has dear, illustrious friends; is the most influential critic of his age; has the ear of a well-known publisher; knows anything important about life, literature, etc. What could be of greater help to a writer than to discuss writing with people who were thinking not of what honour or profit they could make literature give them but of the art itself?

"The Oak Tree," now finished, has won a prize! But it has not finished with you, dear reader. The poem needs not your prize, just you.

Orlando defines herself right now . . .

I arrive at this moment--out of the city, to the country, down and through the great house, to the garden and up the path to the oak tree--and assemble these words to make an ending, a position as good as any other, my vision bare against the moon.

THE END

Afterword

My Introduction ends with "the final push toward the self and toward the wild goose of poetry." Of those two, I have emphasized the latter in my reading of Orlando, although I recognize their interrelatedness. Beverly Ann Schlack, in seeing Orlando as "aesthetic history--the tale of a poet writing his poem" (96), calls "the wild goose of artistic excellence" a "persistent dream, pursued down through the centuries by all writers, including Orlando" (100). Any writer can find in Orlando the familiar elements of his/her development into a "mature" writer.

It is Virginia Woolf herself whom I placed with Schlack and with Harvena Richter--Orlando as "dream phantasy, an analogue of the writer's imagination" (Richter 8)--in preparing this autobiography for publication. "Do not dictate to your author; try to become him", Woolf advises (Essays 2: 2).

Hence this autobiography, by which I notated my own surrender to Orlando (at least to those parts which suited my thesis). I recognized and saluted the Poet's Progress at the heart of Orlando and I made myself at home within its outline. Like Woolf writing Orlando, I plundered various sources including my own "dark pools." Many phrases were borrowed, where appropriate, from Orlando itself. In the end it is I, more than Orlando or Virginia Woolf, who must bear responsiblility for the contents of this autobiography, for in selecting from the central pieces of Orlando's life--those pieces concerned with Orlando's intentions, objects, and methods as a writer, for this

is a writer's life--I selected in part from my own as a way of writing such truth as is found in any autobiography.

A Note on the Text

The following pages from Orlando (and other sources as noted) were used, with considerable "editorial intervention," to help create the style, tone, and content (the narrative of the poet's progress) of each section of the autobiography:

Autobiography		Orlando
page 68	("Orlando sits . . .")	page 11
	("Orlando practices . . .")	11-13
	("Orlando meets the Queen . . .")	14-17
69	("Orlando meets the poet . . .")	14
	("Orlando seeks . . .")	18-19
	("Orlando beholds . . .")	23-24, 30
70	("Orlando, in love, chooses . . .")	32-34
	("Orlando falls . . .")	29, 33, 36
	("Orlando, in love, loses . . .")	38-40
71	("Orlando chooses solitude . . .")	41-45; "Sketch" (73)
	("Orlando reads . . .")	46-48
72	("Orlando pauses . . .")	50-51
	("Orlando delivers . . .")	52-59
	("Orlando experiences . . .")	60
73	("Orlando takes time . . .")	61-66; Essays (2: 190)
	("Orlando furnishes . . .")	66-70
74	("Orlando, having awoken . . .")	75-78, 83-88
	("Orlando, a gypsy . . .")	89-95
	("Orlando dons . . .")	100-102
75	("Orlando reflects . . .")	108-110; Marlatt (45);
	("Orlando strays . . .")	154-156
	("Orlando begins . . .")	158-164
76	("Orlando meets . . .")	165-168
	("Orlando nears . . .")	170-71, 186-91
77	("Orlando relieves . . .")	173-75; Three Guineas (40)
	("Orlando defines . . .")	191-205

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